APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: APR 2007

~~SECRET~~

[redacted]

R13/A

Central Intelligence Agency

EO 12958 1.4(c)<25Yrs
EO 12958 1.4(d)<25Yrs
(S)

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

22 May 1990

Colombia: Implications of the Presidential Election

Summary

Ruling Liberal Party candidate Cesar Gaviria is the overwhelming favorite in the presidential contest to be decided on 27 May. Gaviria received a major boost when the weakened Social Conservative Party split between Rodrigo Lloreda, the party's official candidate, and Alvaro Gomez, leader of the Social Conservatives' other faction; both are trailing badly in the polls. Despite his relative youth, the 42-year-old Gaviria is a trained economist, experienced legislator, and two-time cabinet minister, with a popular agenda for economic and political reforms that distinguishes him from aging leaders in Colombia's two major traditional parties. A victory by Gaviria would represent a generational change in Colombian politics and, because his appeal cuts across partisan lines, he could revive the country's elitist democratic system. [redacted]

President Barco's antinarcotics offensive, now in its tenth month, has been a central campaign issue. Gaviria is a firm believer in strong drug enforcement

---

This typescript was prepared by the [redacted] Office of African and Latin American Analysis and coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to [redacted] ALA, [redacted]

ALA M 90-20054

[redacted]

~~SECRET~~

measures and, if elected, he probably will adopt Barco's general approach to counternarcotics and cooperation with Washington. Gaviria's clear public identification as the candidate with the most hardline position against trafficker violence and the fact that his principal opponents push accommodationist views on drug policy suggest he will hold at least some initial mandate for continuing the crackdown if he wins by a substantial margin. Nevertheless, the traffickers probably hope to benefit from a variety of potential obstacles to drug enforcement, which may include an increase in public sentiment to cut a deal with drug kingpins if violence intensifies. Meanwhile, we believe there is a danger that the drug traffickers may act on their public and private threats to kill Gaviria; although such a move would provoke an initial hardening of the government position, it would, in our judgment, increase the chances that over time Bogota would scale back its antinarcotics effort because most of Gaviria's likely successors are less commited to the drug fight.

* * * * *

The Principal Contenders

as of late April, Liberal Party frontrunner Cesar Gaviria carried a 3 to 1 advantage over his nearest opponent in a field of 14 contenders. Already a heavy favorite, Gaviria received an additional boost when Social Conservative leader Alvaro Gomez refused to abide by his party's decision to nominate Rodrigo Lloreda as its presidential candidate and joined the race under the independent banner of National Salvation Movement. Such divisions among Social Conservatives traditionally have assured victory to the Liberal Party in Colombia's two-party system, and both Gomez and Lloreda are floundering. An ad hoc electoral decree allowing for late registration--aimed at enabling pardoned M-19 guerrillas to form a party and participate in the election--opened floodgates to a rush of additional presidential aspirants demanding equal treatment during the campaign. An existing law provides for free and equal television air time to all presidential candidates, and daily political broadcasts now feature campaign commercials for a variety of marginal independents, including the colorful Regina Liska, a practicing witch. Although the Supreme Court recently determined the electoral decree to be unconstitutional because of established requirements for choosing and registering candidates, the US Embassy believes election slates will remain in force through the balloting this weekend.

Having signed a peace agreement with the M-19 earlier this year, the Barco government appears particularly eager to ensure the participation of leftist groups in the election, in part to undercut the appeal of insurgent groups to Colombian youth. Moreover, the government has long been concerned that high abstention rates raised questions about the legitimacy of Colombia's democracy and presumably hopes that promoting greater pluralism now will help revive public confidence in what is an elitist political system. However, the recent assassinations of Patriotic Union (UP) candidate Bernardo Jaramillo and M-19 candidate Carlos Pizarro by gunmen tied to paramilitary groups with links to drug traffickers have complicated greatly the government's task. The killings have prompted the Marxist hardcore of the UP and some other opposition elements to cancel their participation in the election. Jaramillo's faction of UP moderates, however, has joined the Opposition Front, a multi-party coalition of leftwing Christian Democratic and socialist groups led by the M-19. Even after Pizarro's killing, the M-19 coalition reaffirmed its commitment to electoral politics by choosing former guerrilla leader Antonio Navarro Wolf to bear the Front's presidential standard.

The Frontrunner and his Political Agenda

Gaviria The Reformer

Gaviria has impressive credentials for governing Colombia, and his reformist image and promise of a generational change in leadership has strengthened his appeal beyond usual partisan lines. An economist whose congressional career included a term as Speaker of the House and who has served as both Finance Minister and Minister of Government in the current administration, Gaviria appears well-prepared to plan and implement economic and political reforms over the next four years. He is titular head of the progressive New Liberal Movement wing of the Liberal Party that over the last decade has produced skillful politicians and technocrats supportive of both domestic reforms and strong drug enforcement. Gaviria's faction--once led by popular antinarcotics crusaders like Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla and Senator Luis Carlos Galan, both assassinated by traffickers--often has provoked traditional political elites by denouncing machine patronage and corruption within the major parties and the three branches of government. A source with excellent access said the New Liberals were prepared to break off from the mainstream party--as they did in 1982 and 1986--if Gaviria's candidacy was obstructed by party elders. Gaviria's overwhelming primary victory in mid-March and subsequent smooth nomination, however, have strengthened his efforts to unite the party behind him.

As part of his reformist agenda, Gaviria has been a leading advocate of a referendum--to be held on the same day as the presidential balloting--that would empower the new president to convoke a special assembly to reform the constitution. Barco has authorized the holding of a constitutional referendum on 27 May, and Gaviria reportedly views it as key to his plan to revamp the legislative and judicial systems and further pressure the drug mafia. Despite protests by the bicameral Congress that it alone has the authority to alter the constitution and remains disinclined to do so, recent opinion polls indicate over 80 percent public approval for the referendum. According to the US Embassy, this support reflects popular sentiment for legislative, judicial, and political party reforms, as well as reconciliation with Marxist insurgents and other alienated elements of society. Although efforts to change the constitution will provide the traffickers with new opportunities to exert influence, reform could work to sustain government counternarcotics policies such as extradition of traffickers and seizure of their assets. Once codified in constitutional amendments these and other emergency antidrug measures could not be revoked by the courts or cancelled by the government as part of a temporary state of siege.

Gaviria's Views on Narcotics Issues

Reflecting his own personal commitment and the responsibility he feels as Galan's heir, Gaviria has been an outspoken advocate of continuing the Barco government's antinarcotics crackdown and has made it a central campaign issue.

-- The US Embassy says Gaviria's platform calls for strengthening drug enforcement procedures, constructing maximum security prisons for traffickers, building protective residential enclaves for high risk judges, and dismantling private paramilitary organizations.

-- Gaviria also says he would like to cancel the six-year-old state of siege in exchange for permanent legislation giving the government more power to deal with violence.

The idea of removing the state of siege appeals to most Colombians, who prefer strict limits on the presidential use of discretionary powers--such as employing the armed forces in the current offensive against drug criminals. However, in the absence of permanent and enforceable antidrug laws it is unlikely that Gaviria, as president, would immediately cancel the state of siege and thereby eliminate his only legal basis to sustain the crackdown.

Although Gaviria consistently has defended extradition, US Embassy reporting indicates the candidate is uncomfortable with

the policy for reasons of sovereignty and image--public opinion polls and media coverage often paint the current government as too accommodating toward Washington. All of Gaviria's rivals both within and without his party oppose Barco's extradition policy, These factors and the deteriorating security situation--Gaviria and his family are under heavy guard in response to drug-related death threats--have caused Gaviria to moderate his campaign rhetoric on the issue.

-- Gaviria's strategy as president, would be to cease extradition of traffickers and prosecute in Colombia once a special court system had been established.

-- Gaviria reportedly favors a plan to create a US-style judicial body that would be more investigative and aggressive in prosecuting traffickers while employing plea bargaining to streamline the process.

For the time being, however, US Embassy and other reporting indicates that Gaviria will uphold extradition because he recognizes that strengthening the judicial system will take time. Presumably to avoid being isolated politically, he endorsed an appeal for peace earlier this year made jointly by a broad spectrum of Colombian leaders that suggested the drug lords end their violence and smuggling operations in return for milder treatment from the government. Gaviria also has clouded his position by stating on the one hand that drug criminals cannot be negotiated with nor given amnesty, while on the other hand offering flexibility in dealing with traffickers who shun violence. There are indications that Gaviria might in the future pragmatically reassess the issue of coming to terms with the traffickers, especially if drug kingping Pablo Escobar were captured or killed. In mid-April, Gaviria told the press that negotiations with traffickers might be viable when conditions become "normal", an apparent reference to reducing current levels of violence. This interpretation was subsequently reinforced by Gaviria's press spokesman who said that when Escobar is captured the overall atmosphere will change "radically", the situation will "ease", and Colombia can look for "other solutions" to the problem of drug trafficking.

For the moment, however, a body of information indicates Gaviria personally remains opposed to holding talks with traffickers. In a meeting with the US Ambassador, for example, he criticized Barco for holding secret discussions in January

with drug intermediaries to secure the release of kidnap hostages, including relatives of the President and the son of his closest adviser. Moreover, since the murder last month of M-19 candidate Pizarro, Gaviria has been more strident in his public statements against dialogue with narco-terrorists.

Other Candidates Exploit the Drug Issue

Gaviria's major challengers have seized on the narcotics issue to try and undermine the frontrunner. They are aware that most Colombians view cocaine trafficking as a greater problem for consumers--the US and Europe--than for Andean producers, and they recognize the growing public concern over drug-related violence that has resulted from Barco's crackdown. Social Conservative candidate Rodrigo Lloreda, a former foreign minister and ambassador to the US who last year was a solid supporter of the government's antidrug offensive, now attacks the administration's "intransigence" on extradition and negotiations with traffickers.

-- His platform calls for amnesty for those traffickers who retire from the drug trade, agree to compensate innocent victims of terrorism, and turn themselves in for judgment by Colombian courts.

-- He also has stated that individuals dealing in cocaine would have little to fear from his presidency provided they were not guilty of commiting violent crimes.

Alvaro Gomez has been even more strident in attacking Barco's antidrug policies.

-- He has called for a full pardon for kingpins who show they are serious about retiring from the drug trade, has characterized extradition as Washington's "passing fancy", and has called on the government to extend the scope of peace talks with leftist guerrillas to resolving the war with traffickers.

-- Citing trafficker violence and lack of adequate security for presidential candidates, Gomez has urged Barco to delegate full responsibility for security and public order to a special military triumvirate.

-- Gomez has borrowed proposals from some of Gaviria's rivals in the Liberal Party that narcotics be legalized so as to end the criminality associated with the drug industry.

Meanwhile, leftist groups participating in the presidential election criticize the government for its perceived subservience to Washington and charge that US aid for drug enforcement is being used illegally for counterinsurgency. Before their recent assassinations, Patriotic Union candidate Jaramillo and Opposition Front leader Pizarro had campaigned to curtail extradition and end cooperation with US drug programs on sovereignty and legal grounds. The coalition platform of both organizations is designed to appeal to public sentiment for peace talks to end the drug war, while also calling for demilitarization of drug enforcement and international funding to provide new jobs, housing, credit, and other assistance for tens of thousands of peasant farmers and urban poor employed by the drug industry.

Outlook and Implications for the US

Gaviria is expected to win because he has articulated a more convincing platform for political and economic progress than any of his opponents and has a far better directed and funded organization. His margin of victory probably will be slimmer however, due to several factors.

In addition, Social Conservative candidates traditionally have been helped by low turnout, and Colombia's normally high abstention rate may be even higher this year because of guerrilla anti-election operations and election-related violence sponsored by rightwing vigilante groups and narco-traffickers. US Embassy reporting suggests that abstentionism may also be increased somewhat by public disillusionment with Barco's domestic policies and frustration over perceived irregularities in the March legislative and mayoral elections, in which the new computer system for tallying votes broke down and prevented official results from being released for six weeks.

Nevertheless, we expect Gaviria to win by a comfortable margin and believe that his personal style and administrative experience will benefit him when he assumes office on 7 August.

Although Gaviria likely would fill many ministerial and administrative posts with diverse Liberals, he appears to recognize that Barco's refusal in 1986 to adhere to longstanding precedents for appointing opposition elements to the government contributed significantly to the President's political problems. Gaviria will offer some influential positions to Social Conservatives and other opposition politicians in an effort to strengthen national unity. This, coupled with his well-honed instincts for compromise, should facilitate efforts to launch badly needed domestic reforms.

An English-speaker and admirer of the US, Gaviria has made clear that he hopes to develop a strong working relationship with Washington. As an economist and a nationalist, he hopes the US partnership will yield greater dividends for Colombia on financial and trade issues, as well as foreign assistance. Like Barco, however, Gaviria realizes that during the current period of heightened nationalistic sensitivities in Colombia, there are risks involved in being viewed as "Washington's man." Barco made concessions to nationalist sentiment by giving relatively free reign in foreign policy to his combative Foreign Minister Julio Londono, an outspoken critic of US power in the region. Gaviria will also have to look for ways to strike an independent posture.

On the antinarcotics front, we believe Gaviria will try to build on Barco's cooperation with the US while attempting to carry out longterm judicial reforms aimed at decreasing Bogota's reliance on extradition as well as curbing the surge of violence and lawlessness in Colombia. Because Gaviria has been clearly identified as a hardliner on drug issues compared to his opponents in the campaign, the Liberal candidate should be in a relatively good position to continue the crackdown if he wins by a substantial margin. Nevertheless, Gaviria will need continuing successes like the recent military assault on the Petrolera cocaine complex in southeastern Colombia to prevent his critics from controlling the public relations battle. Moreover, capturing or killing Pablo Escobar could be a crucial watershed in determining whether the government decides to stay the course against those traffickers who are less inclined toward political violence. In our view, pressure on the government to declare "victory" and scale back its campaign against the drug industry

would increase markedly following the elimination of Escobar and one or two other ruthless kingpins, and could lead to a greater divergence of interests between Bogota and Washington.

Meanwhile, the traffickers probably hope to benefit from other potential roadblocks to effective drug enforcement in the next administration. They probably would not attempt to block judicial reforms, such as the creation of specialized courts to handle trafficker cases, because they would see this as an opportunity to reduce the threat of extradition through bribery and intimidation. Traffickers also can be expected to manipulate the convocation of a constituent assembly, on the assumption that by pressuring legislators they could defeat proposals for constitutional changes that might reinforce presidential power to confront the drug industry. The Congress--set to renew its deliberations in late July--demonstrated last December in a showdown with Barco that it was significantly intimidated and subverted by the traffickers, and the most prominent frontmen for drug interests were reelected in the March legislative elections, according to the US Embassy. Moreover, Barco's successor will have to be sensitive to a highly volatile public that is skeptical of US strategy for drug enforcement and that may become even more supportive of negotiations with the drug lords if the crackdown produces more random and lethal violence.

Finally, there exists the real danger that drug criminals might make good on public threats to assassinate Gaviria. Despite extraordinary security measures to protect the Liberal Party candidate and his family, he is vulnerable to attack both before and after the election. Colombia has no provisions for a vice presidential successor to replace a president who dies in office, but the constitution stipulates that an unelected "designate" would be chosen by the Congress from among the leaders of the ruling party. In our judgment, Gaviria's murder would be a major blow to the prospects for reenergizing Colombia's democracy and staying the course over time against the narco-kingpins. Initially, Gaviria's death--like that of Galan--would provoke intensified government efforts against the traffickers, but because none of his likely successors has a similar commitment to the drug fight we suspect the crackdown would gradually begin to ebb, and the chorus for some sort of accommodation with the traffickers would increase.